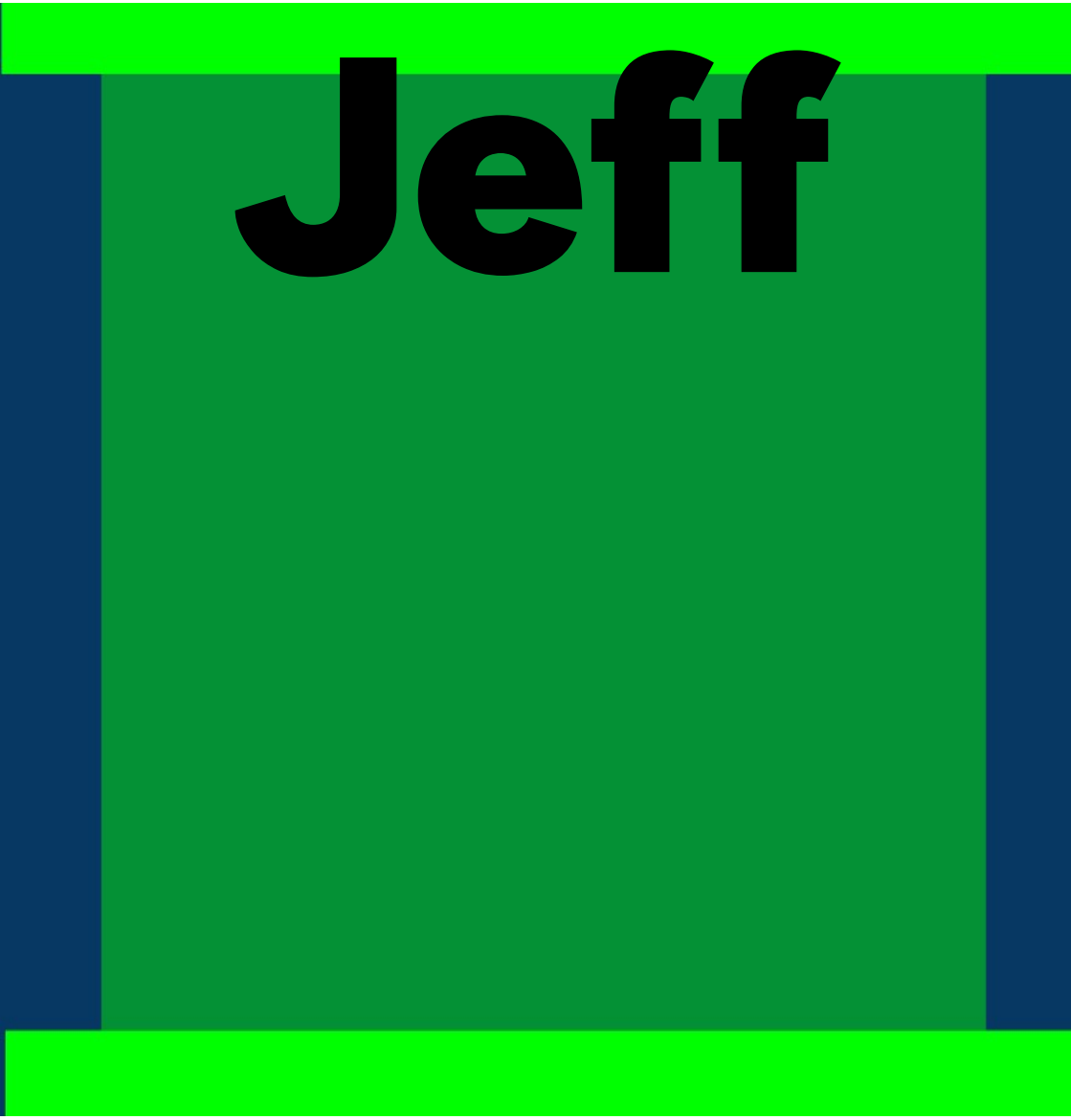
Jeff


Jeff

Jeff Smith woke up in the busy Manhattan neighborhood of Yorkville. At sixty-one years of age, the man was still working five hours a day. The energetic man had promptly stood up from his bed and initiated his morning. He first did his exercises, then his brief wash and brush, brushed his teeth, before eating a utilitarian breakfast.

The second of his two apartment bedrooms was his workplace. He had images of his travels and his university and career certificates in philosophy. He had photographs of his dead wife that he barely got over and of his disconnected children that were making their place in the world. He had already left his mark on the world, a small mark, but one that would add up to become significant. Outside of his study, all that one could pay attention to in his bleak, desolate house was the sound of honks.

He began a call with one of his three students that he would have to attend to that day. Venla was young and thoughtful and truly made Jeff think before responding. She enthusiastically started the conversation by greeting Jeff with a, “Hey!”

Jeff responded, “Greetings. How is your week so far?”

“Good. I got third place in my art competition on Tuesday.”

“Excellent. If you keep on attempting improvement, you will receive the desired results. Both efficiency and dedication should be prioritized."

“Isn’t that philosophy?”

“It certainly is. You have reminded me of where we left off. Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, logic, and aesthetics are the main fields of philosophy. The field that is used in daily life is–”

“Logic.”

“What have I said about interrupting?

“But you're such a slow talker. This is that blah blah blah, just to get to the point.”

“That itself can be answered by using logic. Any conclusion in philosophy requires logic because without it nothing can be said to be true. Your mathematics teachers explain to you that showing your work is necessary. For example, one may say that an orange is green. If there is no logical explanation for that conclusion, then it cannot be known as true? It is because of this that I tell the logic in my responses to your inquiries. Use logic to prove that oranges are not green.”

“Fine. What do I do first? Oh right, I’ll lay down the ground facts. Everything has color, from hair to fruit. You said that an orange is green in color. This claim is incorrect because most people do not see in such shades. This evidence is best represented by physically viewing an orange. If you bring an orange and ask ten people what the color is, they will all say that it is orange. That is actually why an orange is called an orange”

"That is a correct argument. Do you desire another one? Or will you ask another question that is related to this topic."

"What are the limits of logic? When can logic not be used to answer questions?"

"It is correct that logic has limits. However, this is only found in the most basic of knowledge or in the most abstract areas. If I ask you if God exists you may respond by telling me that he does because the universe does. How would you know the universe exists? You could say because God exists. This is a logical fallacy because two assumptions are being connected together in the argument. Eventually, all questioning will end with a logical fallacy or a simple 'I don't know'. In such scenarios, we assume that these basic assumptions are correct. We must do this because if we do not, we will know nothing and therefore do nothing. It is human nature to endeavor. If an assumption we find complies with these basic truths, it is true. When we gain new knowledge, it is only true if it complies with this old knowledge. This is what has created the fields of mathematics, science, philosophy, engineering, history, and more. One basic truth is that I exist. I cannot prove that I exist, but it is my most basic belief that I do ."

"Some things are so abstract that we simply do not know the answer and logic fails. One question is why is there something rather than nothing? I can throw around theories but I cannot use logic to find an answer. Now you can talk."

“Why not just say that one of those theories is true and make them a basic truth?”

“Perhaps that should be done. But since all we know is based on these truths, we are afraid that knowledge may change if we add something. Additionally, some think that with enough thought logic can be used to find an answer. I am with the latter."

“How do you use them for things like ethics? Why should people follow ethical behaviors, and why is admitting mistakes when that could cause harm ethical while cheating secretly on an important test to get the results everyone is relying on unethical?”

“Such great paradoxes. I must compliment you on your art of interrogating subjects. Mankind is to be ethical behaviors because it benefits them in the end. Admitting mistakes to others may cause short-term harm but is the foundation of trust. On the other hand, academic misconduct on a test secretly causes others who would have excelled not to. This takes away others opportunities, which may have benefited the deceiver. Such an example is if someone changes the results on their test to a healthcare university. The university only accepts a certain number of people and those who would have gone are not accepted. Such people would have lost the opportunity to potentially end cancer, or perhaps end heart disease that the deceiver may die from. Ultimately, all religions try to teach that.”

“What is the main point of religion?”

“Religion aims to teach how one should live their life.”

“What is the meaning of life?”

“I strongly defend my argument. I have taught you how to think, not what to think in philosophy so far. Happiness is why life exists and science itself shows this. Humans are hardwired to chase pleasure hormones. Many say that chasing pleasure is not why we live, but that is because of misconceptions of pleasure. Pleasure can come from many different things, whether it be from social media, helping a friend, or experiencing awe. A variety of pleasures are needed for life. Sometimes, chasing boredom and avoiding pleasure is healthy because it causes small indulgences to have bigger effects.”

"My parents don’t seem like they care about anything, but at the same time, care about everything. Does everyone say a different thing to what the meaning of life is?”

“There are various different views on life. What I tell you in this class are my arguments on certain questions, and you may not agree with all of them. From this class, have I said something you don’t agree with?”

“Everything else seems right, but not that statement on the meaning of life. Something just seems...wrong”

“I am glad you agree with me on most of my arguments . However, I am disappointed that you do not

agree with me on the meaning of life. You are young and very intelligent. You will eventually come to see the truth."

Jeff's day went one. He ate his meals, did his chores, and read his books. But Venla's words haunted him. His students rarely disagreed with him about anything, which gave him confidence that he was right. The fact that Venla disagreed with something he strongly believed, in something that guided his life, in something that he was starting to doubt himself, made him wake up the next day.

There was nothing strange about that. However, he had a new desire and excitement that brought a sense of youth. He went about his morning routine before clearing his schedule for the day. He went through his laptop, thinking about how he would pursue the last quest of his life. He took out a notepad to write down what he wanted to do. He wrote, "*I have found inspiration. My students, in their youth and genius, have challenged my beliefs. I will go on the last quest of my life and answer perhaps the most important question there is, what is the meaning of this? To do so, I will research and look at different sources. I will find the one who suffers most, the most joyful one, and the least cheerful one. To attempt to find misery in this world is stupidity because it is everywhere. The same is true for that who is least happy. Happiness is an occasion, not a constant reality. For most this is true. All that is needed to research is the one who is happiest."*

Jeff did his research and decided he would meet Tenzin Lao in Bhutan. He booked a last minute flight,

packed a few items and left. Outside, he saw his first opportunity: a drug addict smoking. Jeff walked over to the man. The man must suffer greatly. Jeff made a plan: he was going to ask why the man smoked, how it made him feel, and whether he was going to recover. Then Jeff would take digital notes. Jeff started the conversation, "What is your name?"

"My name. My name. Not your problem old man."

"What is your name?"

"Asking a hundred times. Curious about some asshole named Tom on the street. You're a weird man."

"Tom, how did you end up getting intertwined with drugs?"

"What the fuck do you want with me, old man? One of those supports people. I ain't telling you nothing."

"I will not tell anyone. I am simply inquiring how some reach conditions that you are in"

"Taking drugs I see. No better than me. Heheheheh. Jack, say hi to the old man. Funny old man."

"As for my question?"

"Nothing old man. I'm not telling you anything. What you do, take my marijuana. This stuff is good you see."

"I can see that you are not in your best conditions right now. Telling a elderly man such as myself will help relieve the load. Perhaps you may eventually be free from your addiction to drugs."

Tom sighed, “There’s nothing interesting about me. When I was young, my parents died. Then my siblings died. Then my grandparents died. I thought I was cursed until I realized my family had gotten in trouble with some fucking criminals. They’re gone and a stupid bum like me is left. Disappointing them. Those people who killed my family are running free and I am smoking this shit to deal with it. I don’t like what I do, but it takes relief out of my depressing life.”

“Are you taking any treatment?”

“No. Those community shit-heads try to help me but I ain’t giving this up. I might not be in good condition, but this is my life. This is how I am supposed to live.”

“Goodbye,”

Tom is a drug addict who qualifies as one who suffers. Drugs help lift his mind from his extremely unfortunate condition. There have been attempts to heal him but he refuses.

And Jeff headed to the airport. Focused entirely on what was to come, forgetting to mourn for those he had met.

Jeff experienced Bhutan on his journey to meet the monk. The mountains were green, lush, and forested, the landscape absolutely beautiful, the houses old and the landing rough and authentic. The air tasted clean, the sounds only of animals roaming. The hotel was absolutely wonderful: it was well-furnished, and clean.

Jeff arrived at 10:00 A.M and was immediately greeted by Tenzien Lao.

"Hello. You must be Jeff Smith. Welcome to Bhutan, I look forward to my discussion with you.

"Hello. I am glad to get the opportunity to meet you." Tenzien Lao's house was even more minimalistic then Jeff's but felt cozy and like a home. Tenzien Lao gave a few gifts to Jeff and Jeff started the discussion after a bit of small talk, "I had believed that the meaning of life is happiness, until one of my philosophy students challenged the notion. I set out on a quest to find the one who suffers most, the most joyful one, and the one who is least joyful. I met a drug addict on the street who had quite a miserable life and it might take time to get better. I believe that you are a joyful man and I am here to discuss with you."

Tenzien introduced himself.

"Shall we get into the discussion? What is the meaning of life, coming from an enlightened individual such as yourself?"

"The meaning of life is such a funny thing. I do have my own meaning of life, attributed to me. I live for my religion and to grow beyond attachment and follow the Eight Fold Path. The meaning I had last life is not the same as what I will have next life and is mostly different for everyone. I will give you my perspective on the meaning of life. I believe that it is an individual and unique thing and is not absolute for everyone."

A part of Jeff broke. Jeff's eyes were not looking at the country, but rather on the ground. Jeff had detached, confused eyes. Tenzien had answered his question and broken it at the same time. His eyes grew desperate, searching for something that he needed. He knew what was left. Just one person, one person who was unhappy. That person would come with the night.

Jeff was in his hotel's common area, with a clear sky and full moon outside. Jeff spotted a woman muttering under her breath with her phone to her ear. She took a pastry and sat in the seat next to Jeff. Jeff's perfect opportunity was right next to him. He started the conversation, "Hello!"

The woman looked across and found that Jeff was the one who had greeted him. Her face grew into a nervous smile, "Hi."

"It's great food, right?"

"It truly is."

"One thing I love about this country is the food."

"Yeah. Yeah. The food is really nice."

"Why have you come to Bhutan?"

"Uh, well I was in need of a vacation. My job allows me unlimited time off, and I have only used four days off so far because I was sick. So I decided, why waste this opportunity, and go on a vacation. One of my friends had just been to Bhutan and really liked this country. I was like, why not and planned an eight day vacation here. At least I

get a break from my kids. I left my husband behind, stuck with those two." She then laughed.

Jeff laughed too, "Well, I'm clearly retired. I do not have much time left before death strikes me. I wanted to enrich my life by coming here"

"Wow, wow that is interesting..I haven't asked. What's your name? My's Maria."

"Jeff. What is your family like?"

"My family, my family is nice. My parents are there, watching protectively of me. Then there is my husband, Markus, who knows how to take care of myself and loves me. My kids, Jalyen who is five and Thomson who is seven, are so mischievous, playful, and cute. There are my cousins, uncles, and nieces who are really close to me. My family is nice, even though I'm the only child."

"How's your job?" He added, "I am aware that I am pushing you, but I am quite interested in your life. Spending a day tomorrow to get to know you better can help us become good friends."

"Thank you. Thank you so much. You're too kind to me. I'm from Los Angeles, and you must be from–"

"New York. I work in New York."

"I've always wanted to go to New York. New York is much bigger than Los Angeles. So I work for Netflix and I am a coordinator. Sounds like a great job, and it is, but with prices so high these days, not so easy. Where did you work?"

"I used to be an English professor at New York University. The salary allowed me to live comfortably without worrying about my spendings. Being a professor gave me enough money to live comfortably without much worry. The recent pandemic has changed the economy."

"Yeah, prices are high nowadays. We all try to put the blame on one thing, but there are so many variables."

"I agree. I have some personal questions that are related to philosophy. May I ask them?"

"Definitely."

"How is it that you live your life and is it similar to the life you desire? What do you like and dislike about your life? I live independently. I am enjoying my life and traveling to places I desire to see. However, my health is poor. The only thing that is different from my life and my dream life are my energy levels."

"Oh, well, that was really honest. I'll also be honest with you. My life, my life is a lot of things. I love my husband and my parents, and I also try to spend time with them. I really do like them but they are not the best. My husband can be immature sometimes and my parents are always intervening in my life. I really love my kids, but raising them is hard work. I go on these vacations and try to have fun, but really it isn't much. I spend hours of my day trying to feel pleasure because I am so burned out from this work. But I think I am improving. I stop my thoughts when they keep on carrying on, so I stop thinking these things. I don't care about what's wrong with my life, I care about

what is right. Ignore the bad things like they don't exist and focus on the good ones. Of course, that will take time."

"Thank you. I believe it is getting late now. I will meet you tomorrow. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Jeff had lied. Terribly. He would not become friends with that woman. He was going to leave tomorrow to find the meaning of life.

Tenzien Lao is a Buddhist monk who lives for his religion and others but does not believe in a universal meaning. Maria is the stereotypical adult, burned out and unwilling to change.

The next day he wasted no time. He rewrote his speech, booked another last minute flight, and went to New York. When he arrived at the speech platform, he found that millions were watching.

He started, "Greetings to all who are viewing this speech. I am philosopher Jeff Smith. I have come here to this auditorium many times before, but this is the most important time. I have come here to tell you what the meaning of life is."

He took a pause, "I have found in this city a man who is addicted to substances. He takes these substances to cope with his difficult life. What surprised me is his refusal to be helped. He was so attached to him he did not want to change. Afterwards, I met a Buddhist monk who embraces his religion and helps others. However, he told me there was no meaning to life. This is where I admit my shame. I

manipulated another, using my knowledge on how the brain works, to answer my questions."

Millions of viewers left the recording and many left his room. Jeff continued, "I know many of you have left. But I ask the remaining ones of you to stay. I have found the truth, and this truth applies to people of all beliefs. I manipulated one who was just like you and me. A person who cared solely about pleasure. Doing what she was told to do without thinking. Living what she believed she was supposed to do. She was learning to ignore her thoughts, to ignore her desiree to think, to be normal and accepted as one of the many billions of people in this world. She was wrong. But her contributions, along with all the other people I have talked about, are the reason why I can tell you the meaning of life."

"In philosophy, we believe we must use logic to make arguments. I will tell you the logic behind my conclusion. We exist. We exist in a universe, surrounded by objects around us. The universe is objects and phenomena to be experienced. However, without life the universe is empty of experience. Therefore, life exists to experience the universe. Most creatures do this through survival and reproduction. However, we have passed that stage. We must use the personality that is influenced by the circumstances of nature to filter our experiences. Our personality is made of values that must be combined together to create the main directive, or meaning, of life. This meaning is what we live for and what we dedicate our life to. Additional notes are

that some meanings may be the same between people. Harm another creature unnecessarily cannot be a meaning because it takes away the harmed's ability to experience the universe. People can live multiple meanings in their life, once exhausting one of them. We must take care of our health to be in the best shape for our meaning, and as society advances our ability to follow the universe's purpose for life may change. In short, life is not for pleasure, life's path is not made for us, but we must look into ourselves to find what it is we want to do with our lives."

There was applause and other means of approval. Jeff smiled. He had gotten the truth out, and the truth would spread. Eventually, the world would change. It would take time, but it would happen. And Jeff, he had changed his own life too.

Five years later, Jeff was sitting down on his chair. His meaning was philosophy. He had gotten a job as a professor in philosophy in the university of Harvard. He annually donated 20% of his earnings to charity. His kids had just left his house and he was having some rest because his grandchildren were quite active creatures. Jeff became close friends with Maria, Tom, and Tenzien. Jeff was not one to smile much. However, he knew he was doing what he was meant to do. The world has not changed much yet. Most saw him as another person saying their own thing. It didn't matter, things would change eventually. He looked up and saw the stars shining.

Thank you for reading the book. I hope that you may find your meaning in life in the same way Jeff has.